



Senate Energy & Telecommunications Committee
Exhibit No. 4
Date 3/17/2011
Title HB 593

Senate Energy and Telecommunications Committee
March 17, 2011

RE: HB 593, directing the Board of Environmental Review to Repeal ARM 17.8.771 and 17.8.772; prohibiting the board from adopting mercury rules that are more stringent than corresponding federal regulations

Dear Chairman Olson and Members of the Senate Energy and Telecommunications Committee:

On behalf of the Association of Montana Public Health Officials (AMPHO), which represents local health departments of all sizes, we urge you to vote "no" on HB 593. This purported "jobs" bill seeks to eliminate state mercury rules and prohibit the state Board of Environmental Review from adopting rules more stringent than federal rules.

Our local public health departments take very seriously their mission to protect and improve the health of all Montanans. Mercury is a toxic element that can have devastating health impacts, especially to children, both in the womb and in the first several years of life. It can adversely affect a baby's growing brain and nervous system. Impacts on cognitive thinking, memory, attention, language, and fine motor and visual spatial skills have been seen in children exposed to mercury in the womb. In adults, mercury exposure can damage the endocrine system, kidneys, and other vital organs, as well as impair speech, hearing, and walking.

Mercury enters the food chain through soil, water and air. It poisons insects, fish, birds, crops, livestock, and humans. It accumulates as it moves up the food chain. Since humans are at the top of the food chain, the more mercury there is in our environment, the more there is in all of us.

We understand that passage of this bill will remove any limits on mercury emissions in Montana. There are currently no viable federal limits to replace those enacted by the state Board of Environmental Review. While we share the Legislature's desire to improve the Montana economy, we wonder whether an increase in severe birth defects, brought on by increased mercury exposure, sends the right message to businesses and workers who are considering coming to Montana.

The bill could also adversely affect tourism, one of Montana's largest industries. We have already seen signs posted at popular fishing sites warning anglers to limit or eliminate consumption of fish due to high mercury levels. Let's not turn our blue-ribbon trout streams into rivers of quicksilver.

In summary, this bill removes any controls over the amount of this poison that may be released into an environment that is the envy of people across the nation. The bill would create a very real health risk, especially to our most vulnerable citizens —our children.

We urge you not to pass HB 593.